

James E. McGreevey
Governor

Susan Bass Levin
Commissioner

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Community Matters

A Newsletter for the Employees of the Department of Community Affairs

DCA Website an International "Hit"

Internet surfers from around the world are finding their way to DCA's website, according to a recent report analyzing a month's worth of activity on our site.

While over 98 percent the website visits originated within the United States, the report also documented visits - or hits - from nations including Australia, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia.

Canada was the foreign nation most likely to visit the DCA website, doing so 162 times in February, the month studied by the report. The United Kingdom was next with 132 visits, followed next by New Zealand, Switzerland and France.

The report also analyzed the most visited pages within our website.

DCA's main homepage, not surprisingly, was the most popular visiting place, recording nearly 15,500 hits in February. The homepage of DCA's Division of Local Government Services was the second most popular web page with approximately 7,000 hits. Next was the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency homepage with just under 5,500 hits, followed by the homepages for the Division of Codes and Standards

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Executive Director of HMFA Named

C. Sean Closkey, director of St. Joseph's Carpenter Society, one of Camden's most successful non-profit housing sponsors, has been named executive director of the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency.

The HMFA Board confirmed Closkey as Executive Director on April 18, following his recommendation by Governor James E. McGreevey earlier in the month.

He replaces Deborah De Santis, who leaves for a real estate development position in the private sector.

"St. Joseph's Carpenter Society in Camden is an extraordinarily successful community development organization," said Governor McGreevey. "I am confident Sean will bring innovation and success to this critically important community development agency."

"Sean is smart, articulate, compassionate and creative. He is a leader everyone respects. We are pleased and privileged to have someone with Sean's expertise in housing, financing and urban redevelopment on our team," said Commissioner Susan Bass Levin.

The primary mission of St. Joseph's Carpenter Society is to serve low-income families by making targeted housing investments to create opportunities for homeownership and stabilize the local housing market.

In his nine years at St. Joseph's, Closkey created the Campbell Soup Homeowner's Academy, which provides financial information and homeowner education to low-income families. He led a team of developers, local government and housing authority representatives that secured \$100-million in federal HOPE-VI housing monies. Closkey also created the St. Joseph's Housing Corporation, which offers employment opportunities and job training to local residents.



Sean Closkey

Closkey has made numerous presentations on housing, urban redevelopment and improving financial opportunities for low-income communities to the Fannie Mae Foundation, the Federal Reserve of Philadelphia, the Urban Land Institute and HUD.

"Through St. Joseph's Carpenter Society, Sean developed and sold more than 275 homes, investing more than \$25-million dollars into the local housing market," said Levin. "His skills and background are a perfect fit for HMFA's mission to help educate citizens and provide opportunities for housing and homeownership to the people of New Jersey."

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Oceanfront Redevelopment Underway



Governor James E. McGreevey and Commissioner Susan Bass Levin join other state and local officials at the groundbreaking of Pier Village in Long Branch.

Construction is now underway at Pier Village, an \$80 million development on the Long Branch oceanfront, funded in part by DCA, HMFA and NJRA.

Governor James E. McGreevey and Commissioner Levin joined other state and local officials at a groundbreaking to officially launch the project, which has been hailed as a model of "smart growth" planning.

"With the construction of Pier Village, Long Branch is well poised for resurgence and revitalization," Governor McGreevey said. "Today's groundbreaking demonstrates the

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State Announces \$9.2 Million Available for Community Improvements

Commissioner Susan Bass Levin recently announced that \$9.2 million in Small Cities Community Development Block Grant funds are now available.

The funds may be used for a variety of projects benefiting low- and moderate-income residents in 166 municipalities and eight counties.

"These dollars have a direct impact on people's lives," said Commissioner Levin. "They allow local communities to improve neighborhoods, fix up houses and create jobs. We want to make full use of this important resource to move New Jersey forward."

DCA has mailed applications for funding to all eligible counties and municipalities. In addition, an application workshop will be held at DCA in Trenton on April 24.

"In this time of extremely tight budgets, these funds have become even more important as a way to help our towns and counties meet urgent needs," Commissioner Levin added. "We will strive to help as many communities as possible."

The deadline for responses is September 6, 2002. Awards will be announced in the fall.

DCA Grants Help East Orange, Plumsted With Special Improvement District Plans

The City of East Orange and Plumsted Township have each received a \$10,000 "Challenge Grant" from DCA to help establish a Special Improvement District.

Under DCA's Challenge Grant program, municipalities can apply for up to \$10,000 in state funds to defray the cost of professional services, such as legal work and consultants' fees, associated with the establishment of a Special Improvement District.

Special Improvement Districts, or SIDs, enable downtown property owners and merchants to form a local management association with the authority to collect assessments of its members to finance downtown improvements.

A Special Improvement District can finance new sidewalks, building facade improvements, security, special events, marketing, promotion and more. SIDs are created by municipal ordinance and managed locally with ongoing technical assistance provided by DCA.

There are approximately 45 Special Improvement Districts in New Jersey.



Commissioner Levin and Karla Schoener, president of the Fire Service Women of New Jersey at training day for women firefighters.

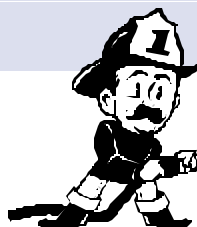
DCA Sponsors Training for Women Firefighters

Approximately 60 women firefighters from across New Jersey recently participated in an annual retreat and training day sponsored by DCA's Division of Fire Safety and the Fire Service Women of New Jersey.

The full-day program at the Dempster Fire Service Training Academy in Lawrenceville included training sessions on pump operations and lectures about woodland firefighting and the problem of juvenile fire-setting.

Since 1996, the number of volunteer women firefighters in New Jersey has increased from 600 to 1,096. The number of career women firefighters has increased from five to 15 in that same period.

"The numbers are improving, but women still make up only a small fraction of the firefighting force in New Jersey," DCA Commissioner Levin said. "We need to do more to reach out to women and get more women in the ranks."



Spring into Fire Safety

Spring is the time to give the house and yard a good cleaning. It's also an ideal opportunity to reduce fire hazards around the home.

"By getting rid of clutter around the house, yard and garage, you're actually reducing the risk of a fire," said Commissioner Susan Bass Levin.

Unnecessary clutter can act as a fuel that intensifies a fire, or can even start a fire itself, according to DCA's Division of Fire Safety.

DCA recommends some simple precautions to reduce the risk of fire this spring:

- L Get rid of old magazines, newspapers, clothing and other items no longer of use.
- L Clean out garages and sheds.
- L Dispose of oily rags.
- L Go through storage areas. Cluttered and overcrowded attics, basements and closets invite fires. Dispose of what you no longer use.
- L Take care that stored items are kept away from furnaces, water heaters and other heat sources.
- L If using a gas grill, always store the fuel tank outside and turn it off when not in use. Check connections for leaks by wetting the valve with soap and water and watching for bubbles.
- L When storing gasoline for a lawnmower, store it outside the home in approved safety cans and out of the reach of children. Clean up any spilled gas right away, and never use gas as a solvent, cleaner or charcoal starter.

Finally, no spring cleanup for fire safety can be considered complete without checking your smoke detectors. Clean the dust from the smoke detector with a vacuum cleaner and replace the battery if necessary.

Rehabilitating the Cities

Some old, empty buildings put you in awe of how well they were built and how useful they might be if given a chance. Some make you shudder at the ugly threat they are to everything around them.

There is no way to rehabilitate New Jersey's older communities without addressing both types of structures, and the state can be proud of two initiatives that are beginning to show results. One is a demolition fund that has just handed out \$8.5 million in low-interest loans to help 13 municipalities demolish 389 unsafe industrial and residential buildings. Another \$11.5 million in previous loans went toward demolition of more than 600 other buildings. Buildings that serve as breeding grounds for vermin, illegal activity and fires are coming down. That makes this money well spent.

In 1998, the state made it easier and more affordable to put useful old houses back on the market. The Department of Community Affairs relaxed the standards for rehabilitating old houses by eliminating requirements that did not affect safety. The amount of money spent on rehab in New Jersey's five largest cities went from \$176 million the year before the law was enacted to \$341 million two years later, the last year for which data are available. That indicates these rules have put new momentum into urban repair.

There is still no compromise when it comes to smoke detectors, the integrity of old electrical systems and other safety items. But developers no longer have to widen old stairways to modern size or assault otherwise sound structures to create a door where a new building would have one. The revised rules make sense. Why demand new construction standards for houses under rehabilitation when people in similar, continuously occupied housing live under the old standards without harm?

The demolition loan fund and code changes have meant big differences for a small investment. How well these things work will ultimately depend on the will and wisdom of local officials. In some instances, both are lacking.

For instance, Irvington officials were so disorganized that they failed to take advantage of demolition funding until state officials ordered the city to apply. It was during that process that a vacant city-owned building partially collapsed, as if to prove a point that city officials had missed. Just like old buildings, some cities put you in awe of their ability to provide for their residents; others make you want to cry.

Latinos Welcome Commissioner

Latino leaders from across New Jersey formally welcomed Commissioner Susan Bass Levin to the job at a recent reception arranged by DCA's Center for Hispanic Policy, Research and Development.

The approximately 75 leaders of the state's Latino community who journeyed to Trenton heard Commissioner Levin make a strong statement of support for the Center and its mission of assisting Hispanics in New Jersey.

"I am just so proud to be the commissioner of this department because this department really does so many great things," Commissioner Levin said. "But one of the things that's so special about this agency is that it's an agency with a heart. And you see that heart best in the Center. This Center cares about people. It cares about making sure our children have opportunity. ... I'm really excited and looking forward to working with you to expand what the Center does."

Many of the guests expressed great enthusiasm for the new Levin era at DCA.

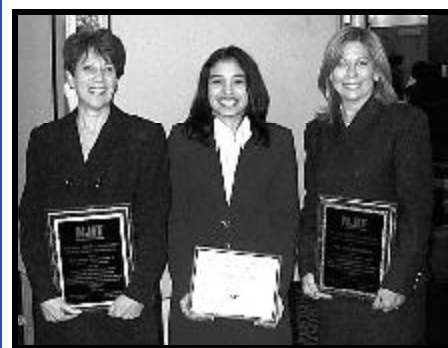
"Even with the fiscal crisis, she was looking for ways for us to strengthen our agencies, and strengthen the Center," said Daniel Santo Pioto, executive director of the Hispanic Directors Association of New Jersey, representing Hispanic community-based organizations. "The support that we have (from DCA) is really empowering the Latino community."

Jeffrey Vega, executive director of New Brunswick Tomorrow, highlighted the selection of DCA Deputy Commissioner **Abe Antun** as one of many indicators of the Latino community's growing influence in New Jersey.

"It's with great pride that we see that we have in this department a deputy commissioner who is Latino, and I think that says something about how our community continues to advance."

Center Executive Director **Angie Armand** described Commissioner Levin as "a visionary leader who I believe is going to make the Center more successful."

Established in 1975, the Center for Hispanic Policy, Research and Development provides grants and training to non-profit groups and community-based organizations that offer services to New Jersey's Hispanic community, such as day care, housing, domestic violence prevention and job training. The Center also conducts research on the status of Latinos in New Jersey, and serves as an advocate within state government for New Jersey's Hispanic community.



New Jersey Institute of Technology recently honored DCA's Housing Scholars internship program. Pictured from left to right are program coordinator Janis Ginsburg of DCA, Nelisabel Mejia, NJIT Housing Scholar of the Year, and Yvonne Calcagno of First Union.

Housing Scholars Program Honored

The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs and First Union National Bank were recently honored by New Jersey Institute of Technology's (NJIT) Division of Community and Public Service as "outstanding community partners" in recognition of the First Union/DCA Housing Scholars Program. Now in its 14th year, The First Union/DCA Housing Scholars Program provides summer internships to New Jersey college students interested in the issues and policies surrounding the development of affordable housing. The program offers a one-week training program followed by ten weeks of hands on experience working with nonprofit providers of affordable housing throughout the state.

DCA Website...continued

and the Division of Housing and Community Resources with about 5,000 hits apiece.

The top 10 most popular pages also included the DCA Program Book (2,830 hits), the Mayors' Directory (2,583 hits) and the Guide to Affordable Housing in New Jersey (2,435 hits).

The state Office of Information Technology provided the report to DCA as a service to help it evaluate its audience and the design of its websites.

"It shows you where people are going the most so you can organize your website to make it more user-friendly," said **Mel Young**, Graphic Artist.





DCA Nursery: Who Is This Cutie Pie???

This cutie pie giving her teddy a ride can usually be found these days on the fifth floor.

Redevelopment...continued

State's commitment to the principles of smart growth. It is also an example of how working in partnerships with local government and across state agencies can lead to successes like Pier Village."

Pier Village will create a compact, walkable neighborhood featuring a mix of apartments, shops and recreational space.

The 16-acre, mixed-use community will feature 420 market-rate rental apartments above 100,000 square feet of shops. The plan also calls for taming a portion of Ocean Boulevard, now a busy, six-lane highway, into a four-lane pedestrian-friendly boulevard with bike paths.

"People will live, work, shop and have fun in Long Branch's Pier Village," said Levin. "We're reviving a city and more importantly, providing an alternative to sprawl."

The first stores are expected to be ready for occupancy by March 2003, while the first apartments are expected to be ready by September of that year. Completion of all phases of construction is slated for April 2004.

In addition, Pier Village's developer, the Applied Companies of Hoboken, is building 88 homes and apartments for low and moderate income families throughout Long Branch in partnership with developer, the D.R. Mon Group of Shrewsbury.

Pier Village will be financed through several state agencies.

- ♦ DCA provided \$4 million from its Downtown Living Program, an initiative that provides financing for the construction of market-rate apartments in urban areas.
- ♦ An additional \$4.9 million will be financed by the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency and the New Jersey Redevelopment Authority.
- ♦ Furthermore, the state Department of Transportation has committed \$2 million for the Ocean Boulevard improvements.

Design plans for the Long Branch waterfront, including Pier Village, were created by the nationally recognized firm of Thompson & Associates, whose work includes the Faneuil Hall Marketplace in Boston, MA.



Read Across America

Commissioner Susan Bass Levin reads Dr. Suess' book, "Oh, the Places You'll Go!" at Lindenwold School No.4 as part of a recent Read Across America program.

Kudos

Ed: You've done a heck of a job sending us all of these resources. Thanks so much. I have passed them on to the appropriate staff. Hope you can continue to send us such good stuff.

(Thank you note to **Edward LaPorte** of DCA's Office of Faith-Based Initiatives from Terry Newhard, executive director of NORWESCAP Inc., a non-profit community development agency.)

Dear Mr. Hannaman: On behalf of the Institute's Board of Trustees and staff, I am writing to thank you for serving as a speaker on the "Condos, Co-ops & Townhouses: Recent Developments & Proposed Legislative Reform" seminar. Your willingness to share your time and expertise with your colleagues is greatly appreciated.

(Letter to **Edward Hannaman** of the DCA's Bureau of Homeowner Protection within the Division of Codes and Standards, from Lawrence M. Maron, executive director of the New Jersey Institute for Continuing Legal Education.)

"I am grateful to Ms. (Frances) Arecco for her assistance in this matter. Sometimes you may hear criticism of the Department and its staff in the administration of the State's programs. I want to make sure that you hear about something that not only was done well, but was done in a manner which was extremely helpful to both the policy of the program and the regulated party. **Frances Arecco** is a credit to the Department and the State."

(Letter to Commissioner Levin from real estate attorney Sean Monaghan complimenting the work of Frances Arecco of DCA's New Home Warranty Program.)

HMFA Executive Director...continued

"I look forward to leading HMFA into the 21st Century," said Closkey. "Working in partnership with Governor McGreevey, Commissioner Levin and utilizing the resources of state government, I know we can make a positive difference in the lives of New Jersey residents by providing greater opportunities for urban redevelopment and suburban homeownership."

Closkey lives in Camden's historic Fairview section with his wife, Pilar, and nine-month-old daughter, Helen.

He graduated cum laude with a BS in Finance from Villanova and a Masters in Economics from the University of Texas. He received the President of the United States of America Service Award in 2000, the New Jersey Governor's Excellence in Housing Award in 1999 and won the Reinvestment Fund's Community Builder of the Year Award in 1998.

Deb De Santis, meanwhile, accepted a position as vice president of development and operations with International Senior Development, a senior housing developer based in Pennsylvania.

